



Al-Risala 1985

June

Editorial

The United States of America is considered one of the most affluent countries in the world today. With a Gross Domestic Product of £4,941 in 1980, the country possesses the wealth to ensure that none of its citizens go wanting. Local authorities also possess the means – at least on paper – to provide everyone with the basic requirements of life – food, shelter, clothing, medicine etc. In 1979, courts in New York, the largest city in the USA, decided that, under its constitution, the city had an obligation to care for the needy and provide shelter for the homeless. In 1981 New York signed a consent decree accepting that obligation. At the time, it was sheltering 3,500 homeless a night at an annual cost of about 12 million dollars. That number has now been increased to 18,500, costing more than 200 million dollars.

Yet the problem of homelessness in New York is far from solved. The number of people without shelter in the metropolis is at least twice that of those who are provided shelter by the local authorities. About one third of the 36,000 homeless in New York are former mental patients who were forced on to the streets when the hospitals and “snake-pit” institutions they lived in closed down.

According to New York's constitution these people should never have been left out on the streets. They should have been accommodated elsewhere. Jane Rosen, commenting on the plight of the homeless in New York (*Guardian Weekly*, December 16, 1984), writes:

“In theory, all the mental patients were supposed to be transferred to half-way houses or intermediate facilities for long range medical care. But city and state funds are always in great demand and emotionally disturbed people have a low political priority.”

It is clear that a world of perfection can be constructed on paper, but how difficult it is to convert it into reality in this world. The reason for this is that man is being tested in this world. Some are being tested by wealth, others by poverty; yet all are exactly the same in the eyes of God in that it is their reaction to the situations they find themselves in which they are being gauged and weighed up on the divine scales of justice. If the rich resist pride and vanity, and show themselves willing to share their wealth with others, and if the poor rise above greed and desperate actions while making positive efforts to improve their state, then all will be fit to inherit the perfect world that God has prepared for man in the hereafter.

The Essence of Fasting

Fasting is prescribed once a year, in the month of Ramadhan. One fasts every day of the month, from the first light of dawn until sundown. During that time one abstains completely from food and drink. According to the Qur'an, there are two purposes of fasting:

1. To make one cautious in life
2. To make one thankful to God

(Qur'an, 2:183,185)

Food and drink is man's most basic necessity. When he is consumed by hunger and thirst, he sees how weak he really is; he realizes how much he is in need of the succour of God. This experience makes him aware of his duties as God's humble servant. This feeling leads to caution in life. Then in the evening, when he eats and drinks, he sees how God has made complete provision for his needs. His heart is filled with gratitude. He praises God, and offers thanks to Him.

The Prophet is reported as saying that God rewards good deeds from tenfold to 700 fold. His reward for fasting, which is specially for Him, will be infinite. In another Hadith he is reported as saying, "There are many who fast and receive nothing in return, but hunger and thirst."

What is the difference between one fast and another, while in appearance both are alike? In actual fact, the appearance is not all that there is to it. The act serves only as a symbol of the essence. One who observes fasting in its essence as well as in its outward form will deserve the promised reward. On the other hand, one who attaches importance to symbols alone, will have nothing to his credit when he comes before God. Fasting of the latter type is of no value in the eyes of God, since the true value of something which is symbolic in its nature is always determined by the will to virtue which it represents.

The outward form of fasting is to abstain from food and water. This abstinence symbolises the fact that man is at God's disposal. He should, therefore, be willing, at all times, to sacrifice anything for His sake; even if it involves relinquishing such basic necessities as food and water.

Obviously one who refrains from taking food and water on specific days, but does not do likewise regarding other things forbidden by God, like telling lies; persecuting his fellowmen; perpetrating injustice and so on mistakes the symbols for the essence, appearance for reality.

Such a man cannot expect to deserve a reward from God.

The real fast is that of one whose whole life is cast in the same consistent mould: who applies in all his affairs, the constraints and bounds that God has laid down; who checks his tongue from abusing others; who stays his hand from persecution; who halts in his steps towards injustice. As the Prophets said, "Such a man can be likened to a horse tied to his rope, who moves only as far as his string permits him." He cannot transgress.

The essence of fasting thus is to eschew all evil ways throughout the year. The true fast is that from which one learns a lesson.

4 June 1985

Who was the God who wrote these Signs?

When Maxwell (1831-1879), the celebrated Scottish physicist, so marvelously expressed the laws of electromagnetic interactions in the form of equations, the great German physicist, Boltzmann, looked at them and exclaimed, "Who was the God who wrote these signs?"

One who studies the universe is struck by the fact that the end-result of all studies of the universe is something highly mysterious and meaningful. In the last analysis, the universe is an extremely organized event: far from being a haphazard mass. This fact forces one to believe in the fact that there is some vastly superior mind behind the scenes.

Einstein, in his nature, was a pure scientist, but he too admitted that he was more of a philosopher than a physicist, "For I believe there is a reality outside of us."

The World as I see it',

In this sense, Einstein says, "I belong to the ranks of devoutly religious men."

The universe is a sign from God. It mirrors the image of the creature. One who observes the universe without prejudice will find God. But those who have distorted vision will continue to grope in the dark even in broad daylight. They will not find God even if they stand in front of Him (72:2),

Opportunities Wasted

In 1952, when Earl Alexander of Tunis (1891-1969) was Great Britain's Minister of Defence, he visited the Police College in Ryton-on-Dunsmore, England. There a Pakistani Superintendent, Syed Muhammad, was undergoing a four week training course. As the only foreigner, he was introduced personally to the Minister. Syed Muhammad takes up the story:

"Before the banquet the Commandant introduced me to the Field Marshal saying, 'Here is Mr. Syed Muhammad, a superintendent from Pakistan.' The Field Marshal accosted me with a 'Salam alaikum' and 'Mizaj Sharif'. I was taken aback, but collecting myself, I said 'Wa'alaikumssalam' and 'Mizaj Mubarak' and expressed my delight at hearing my language spoken by a foreigner, and in a good accent. He told me that he knew my language as in his early service he was posted to the NWFP, and had maintained contact with my countrymen since that time."

(The Muslim, Islamabad, March 22, 1985)

Such was the case with most of the British who served in the Indian sub-continent during the days of the Empire. The vast majority were fluent in both Urdu, and the language of the locality in which they worked.

This gave the Muslims a great opportunity to communicate the message of Islam to their rulers. It put the Muslim scholars, who for the most part were not well-versed in English, in a perfect position to explain the teachings of Islam in their own language.

But the Muslims missed this golden opportunity, and instead concentrated all their efforts on political front. In making their struggle a political and nationalistic one, they ruined the opportunity for propagation of the faith that had been presented to them. For once people have been made into a national enemy; they cannot be expected to be kindly disposed towards one's religion.

God has entrusted the Muslims with a task in this world that is to communicate the message of Islam to other peoples of the world. If they discharge this responsibility; then "God will protect them from mankind" (Qur'an, 5:67). This shows that if Muslims seek freedom from oppression, then they should concentrate on communicating the word of God; God will see to their worldly needs, and protect them from the oppression of men. If, however: they take God's task upon themselves, and in their struggle to free themselves of oppression in this world, forget to struggle to free others of punishment in the world, to come, then they face a twin danger: firstly, that their worldly aspirations will not be fulfilled, and they will remain subjected to other peoples, and secondly that they should reach Almighty God without having performing the all-important task – communication of the, faith – that He delegated to them.

6 June 1985

God's will be Done

Syed Mohammad was born in Kerala, but he received his education in England. The extraordinary ability he was born with, made his 80 year old English teacher, Dr. Stevans Cleveland prophesy: "Young man, one of these days you'll come here to represent your country. But I would not be there to see you."

This prophecy was fulfilled 23 years later, when Syed Mohammad was appointed High Commissioner for England.

He started his career as a barrister. Owing to his special capabilities he came to secure a number of high posts successively. He was selected as a delegate to the United Nations, as a Minister of State, and as Chairman of the high powered Minorities Commission.

One of his close friends, Mr. Khushwant Singh, has written an article in his memory. He rounds it off with these words:

"He had applied for the Congress-I ticket to fight the last Parliamentary elections. Going by his record he would have undoubtedly won it. Kerala State Congress bosses denied him the ticket. It broke Sayyed's heart and a month later the setback took his life." (*The Hindustan Times* 23 March, 1985).

The lesson to be taken from his untimely demise is that we must never attach too great an importance to the material successes or setbacks in this life, but should so discipline our thoughts and emotions that what looms largest on our horizon is the rewards we are to receive in the hereafter, not for having striven for material things in this world, but for having bowed in all humility to God, whether in success or adversity, victory or defeat.

Self-Interest and Pretence

Owing to the rebelliousness of the Jews, they were meted out severe punishments by God. Yet they did not take heed. They persisted in leading a sinful life. Thus they became subject to God's curse which was visited upon them through the prophets. As is mentioned in the Qur'an, however, it did not mean that the prophets said to them, "Let the curse fall on you," or that, "You are the cursed ones." The verse of the Quran is as follows:

"Those of the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by David and Jesus, the son of Mary, because they rebelled and committed evil and never restrained one another from wrongdoing. Evil is what they were doing.

You see many of them taking the unbelievers as supporters. Evil is that to which their souls prompt them. They have incurred the wrath of God and shall endure eternal torment. Had they believed in God and the Prophet and that which is revealed to him, they would not have taken them as supporters. But many of them are evil-doers (Al-Maida 78-81).

The word curse cannot be taken to mean in its literal sense. It actually involved the exposure of their evil ways and the unveiling of the religious mask they had been putting on. The Jews, the former bearers of divine religion, had allowed self-interest, empty convention and racial prejudice to dominate their lives. Religion was being observed only on a superficial level, just to keep up the pretence that they were faithfully treading the path of God. They had interpreted religious teachings according to the dictates of their own desires. By following their own version of divine religion they were able to delude the common man into believing that they were observing it to the letter. The prophets came to warn them and expose their false pretensions.

There are several passages in the Bible which explain what it meant to be cursed by God. Here is an excerpt from the Book of Psalms in the Bible:

"But unto the wicked, God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?

Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.

When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.

Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brothers, thou slanderest thine own mother's son.

These things hast thou done, and I keep silence;

Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself, but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

Now consider this, ye that forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

Who so offereth praise glorifieth me and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.

8 June 1985

The world is stricked by evil so that man can learn to be good

Nobel Laureate Mother Teresa, on a visit to drought-stricken Ethiopia, said that the country's famine was God's way to teaching the world the lesson of charity. "God is teaching us a lesson, He is giving us the opportunity to give until it hurts," the 75 year-old leader of the missionaries for charity order told journalists who accompanied her to eastern Ethiopia at the end of December 1984.

8 June 1985

A shining example

Just five years ago a thirteen year-old girl fled her native Vietnam on a raft. One of the refugee Vietnamese “boat-people”, she spent three days drifting at sea before being picked up and taken to Hong Kong. After two weeks in a refugee camp, she was transported to England. She did not know a word of English, but immediately started working hard to learn the language. She entered Eastley Comprehensive School in Hampshire, England and now, at the age of eighteen, Mai Lee has been granted entry to St. Hugh’s College, Oxford University, to study physics. One of her teachers in Eastley said that Mai had been such a model student it had been a joy to teach her. “She is a shining example to all,” he said.

(*BBC News*, January 12, 1985, and “*Outlook*”, January 16, 1985)

Man's Trial

What a wonderful blessing the eyes of man are. When he closes them, he can see nothing. His whole world is clothed in darkness. There is a world out there which he cannot see; objects that he cannot perceive.

Then, when he opens his eyes, an astonishing spectacle opens out before him. Black can be distinguished from white. What moves appears to be moving, and what stands still is motionless in his sight. Animate and inanimate appear for what they are.

It is in this quality – the ability to distinguish between things – that man is unique. He is able to tell between right and wrong, between light and darkness. He can see truth and falsehood for what they are. He is able to differentiate between what is proved by sound reason, and that which has no sound rational basis.

Man's uniqueness puts him in a critically testing position, for in his power of discretion God is putting him to the test. Man must show that he used his power of discretion to differentiate between right and wrong. A path of justice and one of oppression will open out before him. To succeed in his trial, he must follow the first and shun the second. He will be required to weigh up matters on the scales of sound reason. What is proved by clear signs he should accept; what has no clear proof in support of it is to be rejected.

This task may appear easier than it really is. There is a price to be paid for success in the trial of life, and that price is the negation of self. One can only discover universal truth by losing one's sense of individual selfness. All too often, man is unable to pay this price, thus falling short of the required standard. The fruits of success in life's trial elude him.

Truth appears before man in this world, but he fails to see it. It calls echoes in his ears, but he is unable to hear it. It knocks on his door, but he does not take it in. It is when truth appears before man, and he is able to accept it or reject it, that man is most required to make the right choice. But sadly he fails just where it is most crucial for him to succeed.

9 June 1985

Absolute knowledge cannot be communicated by words

“If it (the reality) could be talked about, everybody would have told their brother.” (Chuang Tsu)

Sharing

Greta Garbo, a Swedish Film actress, was one of the most famous actresses of her time in Hollywood. When she grew old, however, she lost her charm. Her friends deserted her one by one. On the 18th of September 1980, at the age of 75, she celebrated her birthday all by herself. Her biographer who was present at that time asked her whether she regretted opting for a single life and, consequently, a lonely one. Greta Garbo, who at one time had been famous for shunning publicity, and saying repeatedly, "I want to be alone!" replied sadly.

"I think not getting married was a mistake."

Man has been created by God in pairs. Men and women go to make up a whole. The nature of our lives is such that there is no option for us but to share things with each other. Marriage serves this purpose. Through marriage a man and a woman come together for a lifetime, thereby meeting the demands of the individual as well as society.

Any concept of freedom which views marriage as a bondage is mistaken. The consequence of this concept was, inevitably, the emergence of a permissive society which, in turn, created a number of familial and social problems. One such problem is typified by women like Greta Garbo. Such women in their prime attract people by their youthful charm. They enjoy themselves in society, there being all kinds of entertainments engage them day in and day out. But as they advance in age, they lose their charm for the other sex. Their friends forsake them like rats leaving a sinking ship. Then it dawns on them that all their past activities have been of no value. They had lived in a dream world. It is only then that they realize the futility of regarding permanent loyalty as an obstacle to enjoyment. The delights of youth are replaced by a boring life in old age where there is no alternative but to try to seek solace from pets, as there is no life partner with whom to share joys and sorrows. They have no children who will give them tender, loving care, who will perpetuate their name while they leave this world. There is no one to whom they can entrust their life's savings with any degree of satisfaction. There is no one to love and no one to return their love. In a state of bewilderment they are left alone in a world which abounds in life. No punishment exceeds that of being condemned to loneliness in a world bustling with life.

Crime and Punishment

"The business of legislature," writes Bertrand Russell "is to produce harmony between public and private interests. It is to the interest of the public that I should abstain from theft, but it is not to my interest except where there is an effective criminal law. Thus the criminal law is a method of making the interests of the individual coincide with those of the community." Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, pp 741-42.

Fear of punishment alone can prevent man from committing crime. The study of human society reveals the fact that wherever there is no fear of punishment there is no means to prevent man from committing crimes. That is why laws to punish criminals have been formulated everywhere.

A study of different communities shows that not only can man be restrained from committing crime without an effective criminal law, but also that he manages, somehow or the other to find an escape from the laws and saves himself from being punished for the offence. Man's brains, wealth and resources often come to his rescue.

This state of affairs calls for more effective and far reaching laws than purely human constraints, which have succeeded only partially in the prevention of crime. Man can never abstain from it unless he is sure of being brought before a court the judgment of which is ineluctable. This is the law of God. A true sense of accountability before God renders one cautious to such an extreme degree that one begins to avoid crime under any circumstances. Maneuvering an escape from the law of God is tantamount to adding insult to injury. Divine law thus serves not only as a preventive measure but also is an insurance that one will not escape punishment if one has committed an offence.

11 June 1985

Setting an example in materialism

Chinese author Liu Zongren spent two years (1980-82) in the United States, and later wrote a book on his experiences. He concludes that Americans have set a bad example for the world to follow: "Because of their standards, people in other countries are learning to evaluate life only in terms of material possession.

(Two years in the Melting pot, by Liu Zongren)

True Worldly Wisdom

God has given man a special status in this world, yet man is never able to fully exploit the privileged position with which he has been endowed. He has been created with the most noble constitution, only for old age to creep in on him, slowly devouring his handsome frame. He has been given the capacity to enjoy the most ecstatic pleasures but, try as he may; he is prevented by human limitations from fully indulging in them. He has been given a unique earth to live in, with air for him to breathe and food for him to eat. Before he can fully exploit all the gifts that have been showered on him, however, death comes and tears him away from the world he loves.

So man leaves a world which has everything to offer, but leaves him empty-handed. His life on earth ends and he has nothing to show for it. This is because man does not really belong to this world. His real world is the one he will enter after death. The present world is just a preview of the next world, a fleeting glimpse of the real, lasting blessings which will be available there. The pleasures of this world fade away before they can be fully enjoyed, whereas the next world will be one of eternal bliss. Worldly blessings are just a reflection of the infinite opportunities of eternity. It is for one to see eternity in the mirror of the world; to learn, from the limited and imperfect happiness one experiences on earth, the secret of everlasting life.

This world should serve as a reminder of the next, for that is where true success and failure lies. Wise is the one, who uses the world for this purpose; who prepares, during his life on earth, for the next, all-important stage of life; who works in this world for success in the next.

One who becomes engrossed in the pleasures of this world, however, is like a traveler who falls asleep on the platform and misses his train. Nothing could be more foolish than to become lost in a world which will only cause one to lose out on life everlasting.

We are passing through this world on our way to the next. No traveler who is beguiled by attractions which lie by the wayside will reach his destination. So it is with us in this world. If we become lost in the charms of this world, then we will never reach the lofty stations that await us in the hereafter. We will be left behind in this world, and when the world ends we will have nothing but anguish and woe.

Tabligh Movement

It was a cold day in winter. The year 1966. I alighted from a train at a station on the North Eastern Railway. On my way back home, I was struck by something rather remarkable in the appearance of a group of pedestrians who were trying to cross the street. Dressed in coarse, simple clothes, with bags and beddings on their shoulders, they somehow had a religious aura about them as they pressed onwards. In those days they looked like creatures from another world, but nowadays they have become such a familiar sight that they hardly need description.

Innumerable such people, traveling in caravans have opted for the hard way to serve the cause of God. Many such groups, by turns, are constantly on the move. This great movement, generally known as Tablighi Jamaat, has inspired in people a new fervour, a new zeal to serve the divine cause. It is truly amazing to learn that its founder was a slight, short-statured individual, who, because of the impediment in his speech, was rather unimpressive in personality. There were times when he found it difficult to express himself due to his bad stammer. It was this extraordinary figure, known as Maulana Ilyas, who founded the Tablighi Jamaat, thus inspiring among thousands of people a religious zeal which had been unknown for centuries. Although frail to the point of physical weakness, he possessed great inner strength which provided solutions to every problem which confronted him. His indomitable will and staunchness of purpose in guiding people along the right path made him exert himself in a manner which many a physically stronger person would have found arduous.

Early Circumstances

If one climbed a high building in Delhi at the turn of the 19th century, one could see some buildings scattered here and there in the vicinity of sprawling jungles. This was the place famous for the shrine of Nizamuddin Aulia, which has given its name to the place. Maulana Mohd Ismail, a religious scholar, who died in 1898, lived there. In his eagerness to help the people he had taken to seeking out labourers in that forsaken place, offering them his help, and fetching water for them to drink. Then he would say a prayer of thanks that God had granted him the opportunity to serve His servants.

It was this saintly person who was the father of Maulana Ilyas. This family traced its descent to the Valiullahi family, who had been chosen by God to rectify the distorted picture of Islam which had resulted from the Taimur family's wrong attitude towards religion. He was born into a family where there was no need to have recourse to make-believe stories for inspiration, as there had been a succession of such devoted people in his family whose true stories of sacrifice in the path of God served the purpose. Even the women would tell their babies the stories of their forefathers who had at all costs, dedicated themselves to the divine path. Religion was practised to the letter. The mothers in this family naturally did not wish material success for their children. On seeing extraordinary abilities in them, they did not say, like common people, "This child will be rich and great." They said rather, "This child reminds me of

the companions of the prophet. We wish he could follow the same path.” It was in such an atmosphere that Maulana grew up. His parents owned a bookshop which was managed by his elder brother, Maulana Yahya. Maulana Ilyas, being too weak for physical exertion, could not undertake any job that involved physical strength. He did not, therefore, help his elder brother in his work. Instead he devoted his time and attention to religious studies, while his elder brother worked hard to run the bookshop. One day the manager suggested to him that Maulana Ilyas should also be engaged in the work. Maulana Yahya, was quite disconcerted at his remark, and replied, “The prophet has said, ‘You owe your provision to the weaker embers of your family.’” “I believe that it is owing to this child that I receive my provision.” He further admonished him not to say such things to him in future. In this atmosphere of absolute purity of thought, word and deed, it was natural that his emotions and feelings should be cast in the same mould. One of Maulana’s class fellows has narrated an incident which took place when Maulana was a student. “One day,” he said, “Maulana brought a stick, and holding it in his hand he said, “Come, my dear Riyazul Islam, let us declare holy war on those who do not say their prayers.”

After completing his school education, he went on to higher studies. Soon he was offered the post of teacher at the Mazahirul Islam religious institute at Saharanpur. But before long, new opportunities opened out before him, and his training period commenced. His father had set up a small religious school in Basti Hazrat Nizamuddin to impart free education to poor students. After the death of his father, the elder brother had taken charge of it. When, on this sad occasion, he came home to condole, the people who were running the school insisted on his staying there and take up his father’s cause. He acceded to their request.

Now there began a new phase in his life. It was at this place that he first came into contact with the Mewatis. Moved by their religious and spiritual poverty, he set himself to reform their condition through religious education. The initial stimulus thus came from Mewati Muslims. Gaining momentum gradually, the work of bringing people closer to the path of God, spread far and wide.

Three Kinds of Men

From the religious point of view, the highest ranking mortal is one who goes in constant fear of his Lord, turning to Him in all matters. Such a man leads his life as if God were watching over him. He fears an invisible God far more than any visible objects of this world, and bows before his Lord with a contrite heart. Such are the souls desired by God. The Almighty is pleased with those who have suffered for His cause. When they meet Him on the day of the great reckoning, God will shower upon them His choicest blessings. He will send them into evergreen gardens where they shall remain forever. There they shall have all that they desire, and more. God's blessings are infinite.

Ranking somewhat lower is the occasional and inadvertent wrongdoer. Yet he too can be forgiven by God and share His blessings, provided he is a true believer, has mitigated whatever evil he has done by good deeds and is not obstinate about giving up his evil ways. All he has to do then is turn to God in penitence and confess his sins: God will then turn to him in mercy and forgiveness.

The mortal who ranks lowest is one who is preoccupied with the love of the world, love of himself and pride. He is interested in mere externals, mere fripperies. He never holds his tongue for fear of his Lord. He does not stop short when reminded of the word of God. It is true that he will be rewarded for his deeds in the course of his own lifetime. Success and glory will be his. He will never suffer setbacks or losses. But it is just such a one who in the next life will suffer hellfire and brimstone, having lived for himself alone, with no thought for God. It is then that he will learn what it means never to have cared a whit for the next world. It is in the life hereafter that he will learn that his strivings were in vain and his ambitions fruitless.

Life's Lottery

A truck driver, Stuart Kelly, from Ontario, Canada, once bought lottery ticket. Much to his astonishment, he secured the first prize of \$13.9 millions, the biggest lottery prize ever to be received by a single person in Canada.

Childless, Stuart Kelly obviously received far more than his real or imagined requirements could possibly be. His happiness, however, was not to last long. Within three months of the receipt of this enormous sum, he was doomed to bear the unbearable. He took ill; the doctors diagnosed his illness to be the deadly, incurable disease – cancer. No amount of money could save him. No sooner had life seemed to offer him all possible comforts and luxuries after a prolonged period of 35 years of hardship and toil, than he discovered that death was lying in wait. The reality that all happiness was destined to fade away, sooner or later, dawned on him.

Man's real problem is not wealth but limitation. Neither wealth nor resources can help him overcome his limitations. It is always in hiding, ready to mar our pleasures.

Limitations vary in the forms they take. Disease, accident, old age boredom, and death, to name but a few, come between us and our desires and prevent us from fashioning a world of our choice.

Wealth is not life but only a means to an end. Means always have secondary place. Primary importance cannot be attached to them. Man, who is often unable to differentiate between the real issues and the means tends to ignore this fact. He comes to consider wealth as summum bonum; an end in itself, treating it as if it were an alternative to life itself. That is why he sets himself to attain it, whatever the cost.

In view of such insuperable obstacles, man can never succeed in creating the world of his dreams. There are only two choices open to him. Either to treat this world as the be-all and end-all and end in total frustration; or to discover the secret of a successful life by opening his mind to the next life and planning his present life accordingly.

"Verily Allah revealed to me," the Prophet said, you shall be modest towards one another till nobody can boast over another, and nobody can make oppression upon another." (Hadith)

Flawed Ideals

Philip John Bayer, the founder of Quaker State Refining Co. was one of America's business magnates. The only son born to him was succeeded by one daughter, Eleanor Ritchey.

Being a single child she inherited an enormous sum of money. But she hated human beings, and chose to remain single all her life. She died on October 14, 1968, at the age of 58.

Having no human beings as her companions, she developed curious bits in pursuit of pleasure. For example, she would buy innumerable pairs of shoes. Since she never wore a pair of shoes more than once. Similarly she would buy stationary boxes with astonishing frequency, mention but a few of her idiosyncrasies. She left 1707 pairs of shoes and 1224 stationary boxes to posterity.

Stranger still was her interest in dogs. Whenever she went out in her car, she would pick up stray dogs on the street, bring them home and look after them with special care. In this manner she collected about 150 dogs. When her home could no longer accommodate such a huge pack of dogs, she initially bought a 12 acre piece of land to ensure their comfort.

In her will she had it mentioned that all her wealth would go to her pet dogs. Only after they had all died, was it to be transferred to the Alabama School of Veterinary Science. At the moment, only one dog, called Musketeer, survives. This 13 year old dog has become so weak at when it walks; its legs tremble, and while coughing it falls to the ground. It will surely not live for long. But until it does actually die, the School of Veterinary Science will not receive its magnificent inheritance.

Even the bequeathing of her wealth, although, to her, altruistic in purpose, was marked by eccentricity, and was obviously the offshoot of a flawed idealism. How much better it would have been if her efforts have been directed towards human ends. Without a sound set of ideals, humanity had become less than nothing for her, and her energies were frittered away in senseless phobias. How many lives are thus wasted, because, they are misdirected? No real ethical fulfillment is possible without a balanced set of humane ideals.

The rank of a man of silence is better than divine service for sixty years. (Hadith)

Glorifying the Dead

When Moses preached the word of God in Pharaoh's court the nobles refused to accept his message. Then a "believing man" among them stood up and tried to put his people right. His whole address is given in the chapter of the Qur'an which bears his name – "the Believer." One sentence of his speech, which was delivered in the most benevolent and earnest tone, read like this:

"Long before this, Joseph came unto you with clear signs, but you never ceased to doubt them; and when he died you said: 'God will never send another prophet after him.' Thus God leaves in error the doubting transgressor" (40:34).

What he said was quite true. While Joseph had been alive the people of Israel doubted the truth of his prophethood. It was only when he died that people acknowledged his worth. Their acknowledgement, however, only brought them to the sad conclusion that now God would not send another prophet like him.

The same was the case with the people of Mecca. They were proud to think of Abraham as their forefather and used to revel in his greatness. But when his successor – Mohammad, who was made a prophet in answer to Abraham's prayer – came amongst them, they thought nothing of him and did all they could to discredit him.

This is always the way with people. They always eulogize their dead, even to the extent of concocting tales about them which make them seem far greater than they actually were. As for the living, they refuse to admit their greatness; even when told true stories about them, they scoff in disbelief. They exaggerate the greatness of those who have passed away beyond all proportion. But they are not ready to accept even the honest worth of their contemporaries.

To acknowledge the worth of the living is a sign of vitality and dynamism in a people. To show undue veneration of the dead and total disregard for the worth of the living, on the other hand shows that a people have collapsed into the depths of spiritual and intellectual inertia.

The most pleasing of actions to God is that which is done continuously though it be little. (Hadith)

Understanding the Qur'an

"Wahab Ibn Abdullah Al-Sawa'i, who belonged to the generation after the companions of the Prophet, once asked Ali Ibn Abu Talib whether he possessed any divine inspiration which was not contained in the Qur'an. Ali swore an oath by the One who split the seed and brought life into existence, that they had nothing besides the Qur'an: the only additional source of inspiration was the true understanding of the Qur'an which God bestows upon a person" (*Tafseer Ibn Kathir*, Vol. II. p 77).

Ali's answer shows that it is one thing to understand the written words of the Qur'an, and another to penetrate into the deep meanings of the Book of God. To understand the words of the Qur'an all one has to do is read it. But true understanding of Qur'anic meanings can only come from deep thought and contemplation. The Qur'an an ocean of profound meanings; only one who plunges into the depths of its waters can fathom the treasures it contains.

One can put this another way and say that to understand the words the Qur'an one has to know the Arabic language; but to understand the meaning of the Qur'an one needs to be versed in divine wisdom. One can study the Arabic language, read the Qur'an, and understand outward meaning. But the Qur'an has meanings that lie hidden beneath the surface. These meanings can only be understood by one who has illuminated his vision with the light of God.

All one has to do to ascertain the words of the Qur'an is open its pages. But to discover the Qur'an's meanings one has to explore it in depth. One can sit and listen to a recital of the Qur'an, or hear some one else reading a translation, but this will only enable one to understand the words of the Qur'an. To penetrate to its inner meanings on the other hand, requires an effort on one's own part.

If one only studies the Qur'an on a superficial level, it will only have a superficial effect on one; one's belief in the Qur'an will lack the force of inner conviction. One who discovers the Qur'an in its inner meanings, on the other hand, develops a live attachment to the Book of God. The Qur'an becomes a source of inspiration and spiritual nourishment in his life. All his thoughts and actions spring from the Qur'an. It becomes the very life and soul of his existence.

The Way of the Universe

Man is an imperfect being in the midst of a perfect world. The stars and the planets, wind and water, trees and animals, are all just as they should be. They do not deviate from the path prescribed for them in nature. Man, on the other hand, deviates from his natural path. The actions that he performs, the person that he develops into, are a contradiction of nature. He follows a path far removed from that which has been laid down for him.

While this paradox poses some questions for man, it also provides the answer to them. It shows that man's problems in this world all stem from the fact that he has deviated from the path of nature; only by re-adopting that path can he find a solution to them. We can see that the path which other objects in the universe follow is one of harmony and perfection. If man were to follow the same path, then human society would surely acquire the same ideal qualities.

The very fact that our imperfect human world lies in the midst of a much larger, perfect natural world, shows us what our aim in life should be. We must first try to understand the world around us, and then strive to base our lives on the principles that function in the rest of the universe.

One thing emerges with absolute clarity from an observation of the universe: everything is inextricably bound together in one specific law of nature. Nothing ever strays from the path that has been laid down for it. Molecules of hydrogen and oxygen, for instance, can always be depended on to make water in the same way. One can always predict the chemical compounds which will form from mixing certain elements, for these elements invariably act according to definite laws. When metals dissolve and water turns into steam, they do not do so erratically; they do so exactly as prescribed in the law of nature.

Man is required to act in the same manner. His character should be moulded according to the natural and specific laws of nature, so much so that he acquires a predictable personality. One should be able to depend upon him to act in certain ways in certain situations. Rather than following impulses, which sometimes lead him in one direction, sometimes in another, he should faithfully adhere to the path that the whole of the natural world follows so successfully.

There is but one proper code of ethics for both man and the universe. The rest of the universe is observing that code. The only way that man can succeed is by following suit.

The Prophet of Islam

Part I Chapter V (contd.)

Under the tribal system, tribal protection was essential for individuals. At the beginning of the period spent in Mecca, the Prophet Mohammad, may peace be upon him, enjoyed the protection of his uncle, Abu Talib, chieftain of the Banu Hashim. In the tenth year of his mission, Abu Talib died, and his mantle descended upon Abu Lahab. Since Abu Lahab refused him protection, the Prophet began seeking the protection of some other tribe, so that he could continue his preaching work. It was for this purpose that he went to Taif.

Along with his servant Zaid Ibn Haritha, the Prophet made the 65mile journey to Taif, a fertile oasis south-east of Mecca. He had some relatives in the town, but at that time power rested with three individuals: Abd Yaleel, Masood and Habib. The Prophet met all three of them, and all three refused to join him, or even extend their protection. "I will tear the curtain of the Holy Ka'aba, if God has made you His prophet," one of them said. "Couldn't God find anyone else to send as His prophet," added another sneeringly. "I swear that I won't speak to you!" the other said. "It would be an insult to you for me to do so if you are a true prophet, and an insult to myself if you are false in your claims." (Seerat Ibn Hisham, Vol. II, P.L.C. 29).

Dispirited, the Prophet set out on the return journey. But still the people of Taif did not leave him alone. They set the urchins after him, and a volley of stone-throwing and abuse drove him out of town. Zaid tried to shield the Prophet with his blanket, but with no success. The Prophet's body was wounded from head to foot.

Some way out of town, there was a vineyard belonging to two brothers by the name of 'Utba and Shayba. It was dusk when the Prophet reached there, and he took refuge in it. His body was covered in wounds, but on his lips were prayers. "Lord," he cried, "help me; do not leave me to fend for myself."

'Utba and Shayba were both idolaters; but when they saw the Prophet's condition, they took pity on him. They had a Christian slave by the name of Addas. They told him to fetch a few bunches of grapes, and take them in a bowl before their guest. Addas did as he was told: he brought some grapes to the Prophet and requested him to partake of them. The Prophet recited the name of God as he took them in his hand to eat. Addas looked at the Prophet's face. "By God," he said,

"it is not usual for people in this land to utter these words." The Prophet asked Addas where he came from, and what his religion was. Addas replied that he was a Christian, and hailed from Nineveh in Iraq. "So you are from the town of the good Jonah, son of Matthew," the Prophet observed. "How do you know Jonah, son of Matthew" Addas retorted. "He was a prophet, and so am I," the Prophet said. On hearing this, Addas bowed before the Prophet, kissing his head, hands and feet.

Utba and Shayba were looking on. "Look," they said to one another. "This fellow has corrupted our servant." "Shame on you," they said to Addas when he returned. "What were you kissing that fellow's head, hands and feet for?" "Master," Addas replied. "There is nothing greater than him on the face of the earth. He told me something that no one but a prophet can reveal" "Shame on you," they repeated. "Be careful that he does not turn you away from your religion; for your religion is better than his."

In a single journey, God's prophet was treated in three different ways by three different groups of people: one pelted him with stones; a second extended hospitality to him; a third acknowledged his prophethood.

There is a great lesson to be learnt from this event – namely that there is no end to possibilities in this world. If you stand in an open plain, there is sure to be a tree's shade in which you can find rest. If you are treated cruelly by some, then do not despair; if you adhere to the path of truth, and do not respond in a negative way to such treatment by others, then God will surely come to your assistance. Some may not rally to your cause, but you are sure to find a place in the hearts of others.

The Prophet of Islam met with dire opposition when he started his preaching mission in Mecca in the year 609AD. He was subjected to torment upon torment. The people of Mecca did whatever they could to thwart and oppress him. But his mission continued to gain ground, and finally the message of Islam reached the people of Medina, the majority of whom accepted Islam. Together with the Prophet, other Muslims were also persecuted in Mecca. The Prophet told them to go to Medina, where they would be received by their Muslim brethren, who were ready to give them succour. One by one, the Muslims started emigrating to Medina. When the Quraish heard about this scheme, they made efforts to prevent the Muslims from leaving Mecca: some they beat up, some they took captive; but somehow most of the Muslims managed to reach their refuge in Medina.

Finally (622AD) came the Prophet's turn. The Quraish realized that, with the rest of the Muslims safely installed in Medina, it would not be long before the Prophet himself joined them. Leaders of all the tribes of the Quraish, except the Banu Hashim, met in the great hall of Qusayye Ibn Kalab's house, where all such meetings were held. Various proposals were put forward, but finally all agreed that a person from every tribe should attack and kill Mohammad: his blood would thus be divided over all eleven tribes; the Banu Hashim, the tribe to which the Prophet belonged, being unable to fight with all of them, would accept compensation instead. Next night, they surrounded the Prophet's house, waiting for the Prophet to emerge so that they could pounce on him and kill him.

The Prophet knew exactly what was going on. Quietly, he continued his preparations. That night, according to plan, he left Mecca along with Abu Bakr. The Prophet realized that when news of his departure reached the Quraish, they would send search parties in pursuit of him. So he and Abu Bakr hid in a cave of Mount Thur, four miles out of Mecca. They planned to stay there a few days, until the Quraish called off their search, and the two could continue their journey to Medina.

The Quraish horsemen started looking everywhere for the Prophet. It was not long before one brigade reached his hideout in Mount Thur. There they were, armed and standing at the mouth of the cave: the Prophet and Abu Bakr could even see their feet. Abu Bakr, sensing the critical danger they were in, said to the Prophet: "The enemy are upon us." "Don't worry," the prophet reassured him: "God is with us. We are only two," he continued calmly: "but how do you rate two men who have God as a third companion?"

The Prophet and His Companions

Doing everything, but feeling one has done nothing

Mughaira Ibn Shu'aba's fire-worshipping slave, Abu Lulu, had made his murderous attack on Umar, the second Caliph of Islam. When Umar drank some milk, its whiteness flowed from his wounds; "If I had the earth full of gold," he said, swearing a solemn oath, "then I would give it in order to free myself of the Lord's punishment before it descends on me." "When the Muslims were oppressed," Abdullah Ibn Abbas said to Umar, "the Prophet prayed that God may strengthen both Islam and the Muslims through you. You became Muslim and Islam was the stronger for your conversion. Muslims held their heads high with you at their side. You emigrated to Medina and joined in every campaign with the Prophet. When the latter died, he was well pleased with you. You then became the first Caliph's advisor and assistant; he too was well pleased with you when he left this world. Then you were elected Commander of the Faithful. Through you God gave the Muslims prosperity and progress. His enemies capitulated before you. Now he has given you a martyr's death. Blessed are you." "The one who believes the like of you will be deceived," Umar said, and then asked. "Abdullah, will you bear witness on my behalf on the Day of Resurrection?" Ibn Abbas said that he would. Umar then asked his own son, also named Abdullah, to place his face on the ground. Abdullah Ibn Umar raised his father's head and rested it on his own ankle. "No, on the ground," Umar said. Abdullah obeyed. "Woe betide you, Umar," the second Caliph said to himself. "Woe betide the one who gave birth to you, if God does not forgive you." He then surrendered his soul. May God be pleased with him. (Tabrani)

Humility at all times

Abdullah Ibn Masood told how, during the Badr campaign, there was one camel to every three men. People used to ride in turns. It was the same with the Prophet: he was sharing a camel with Abu Lababa and Ali. They both asked the prophet to ride on the camel; they would walk in his place. "You are no stronger than me," the Prophet told them. "Nor do I have any less need of reward from God than you." (*Al-Badaya wa'n-Nahaya*)